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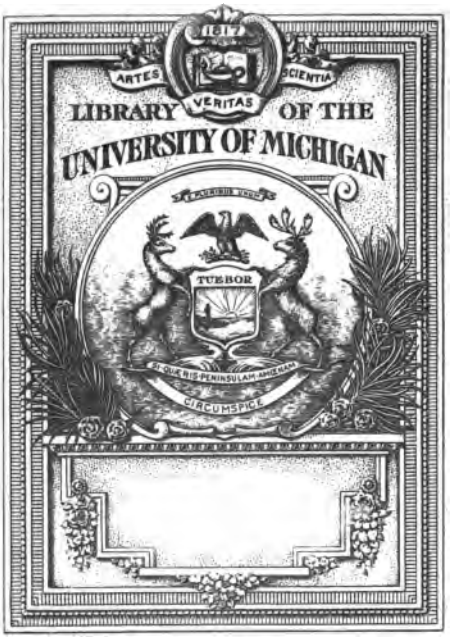
December 3rd, 1894

BOSTON
PRESS OF ROCKWELL AND CHURCHILL
1894



THE GIFT OF
S. A. Green

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(*From the New York "Herald," March 1, 1894.*)

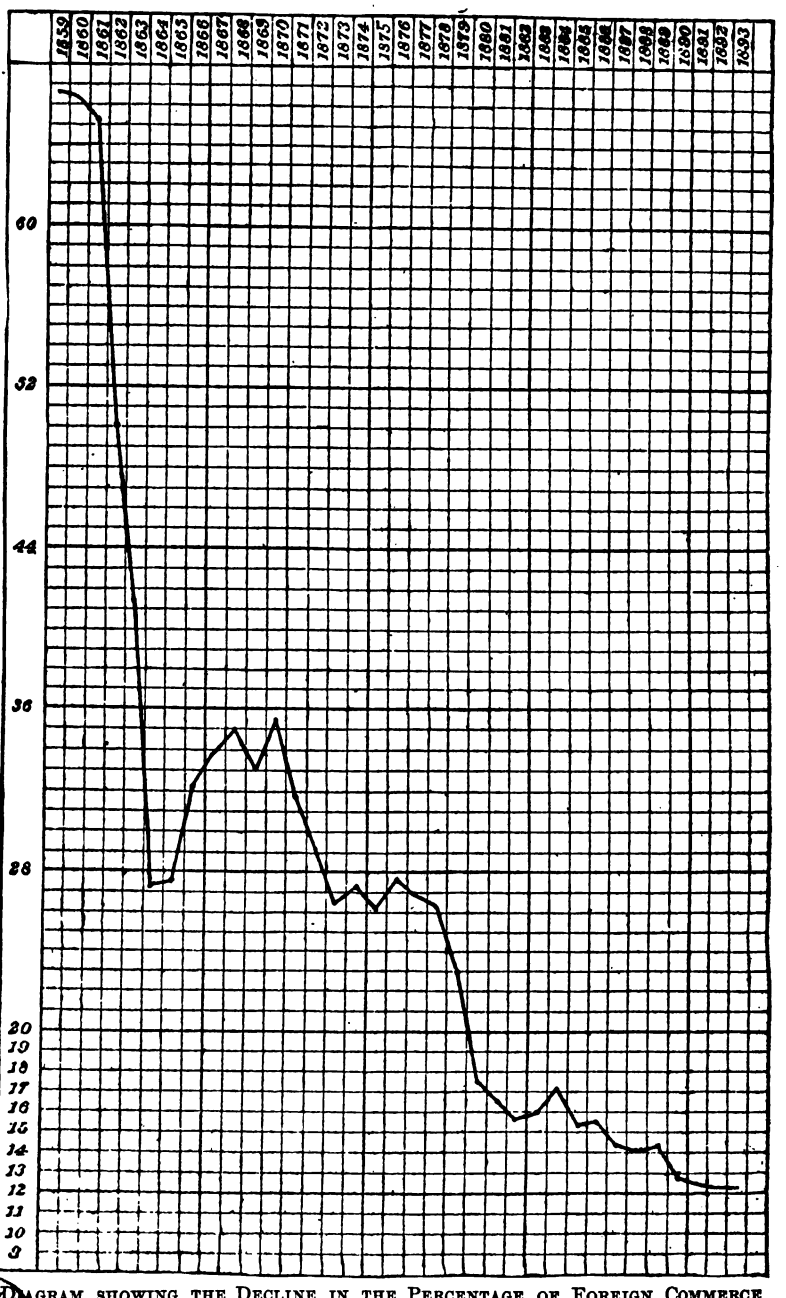

DIAGRAM SHOWING THE DECLINE IN THE PERCENTAGE OF FOREIGN COMMERCE CARRIED IN AMERICAN VESSELS SINCE 1859.

UNIV. OF WASH.

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PREFACE.

PRESIDENT CLEVELAND, in his address at Philadelphia upon the occasion of the launch of the steamer "St. Louis," has struck the key-note for the next campaign of Liberalism, in all directions, against the combined forces of monopoly and ignorance. But what he has so well said ought not to be left buried in small print in the daily or weekly press, where the whirl of each day's current news sweeps away the record so rapidly.

We therefore attempt to put into more readable shape not only what was said on that notable occasion, but also such reports as can be reached of the opinions of the leaders of progress in the great focus of finance, New York city, and other centres of business.

We give prominence to the comments drawn out by the President's address, but we are permitted, by the courtesy of the New York "Herald," to draw very largely upon what was said last spring by that autocrat, whose flag always floats so high when either the yacht fleets or the war fleets of the world bring to the front their claims to distinction.

DECEMBER 3RD, 1894.

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CHIPS.

It is clear from President Cleveland's pithy and far-reaching speech at the launch of the steamer "St. Louis" at Philadelphia on the 12th of November, inst., that he has a realizing sense of the burden under which our ship-owners lie crushed, and that he will do his whole share towards its removal.

On that occasion the President gave the key-note of his policy in regard to our navigation laws, the survivals of a past condition of things, much like the timbers of Noah's ark were these to be exhibited in a ship-builder's yard of the present day.

When those navigation laws were framed our teeming forests, backed by our skilful ship-builders, had enabled us to lead the commercial world everywhere on blue water. Our superiority over England, the only European power which in the early part of this century pretended to compete with us, was so great that no passenger crossing the Atlantic, and few shippers of merchandise, ever dreamed of using a British ship when an American was within reach.

England had, until about the year 1860, completely manacled her ship-builders by her protective laws; but she was then slowly reaching out towards freedom from the tyranny of her guilds and of her aristocratic land and colonial monopolists, and when about that time the evolution of the material for

ship-building from wood to iron, and that of the paddle-wheel to the screw for steamers, had completed itself, she had quietly freed herself from her particular form of handcuffs, while Uncle Sam with fatal ingenuity was about inventing another even more crippling form of these, and was ready to slip his wrists into them.

The result is, that whereas before the war of the Rebellion we were doing over sixty per cent. of the foreign carrying trade of this country, we are now reduced to a bare twelve per cent., with a strong tendency towards further decline. The question now arises, What is our remedy? Of course difficulties must arise growing out of the controversies in party politics, besides any intrinsic ones; but the New York "Herald" in its issue of March 14, 1894, has suggested a bill very closely conforming to, if not identical with, that finally reported by Mr. Fithian's committee, which seems to meet the case.

(*From "The Nation," Nov. 15, 1894.*)

President Cleveland gave a characteristic exhibition of the courageous plain-speaking which has been the chief cause of his popularity, at Philadelphia, on Monday, when he took occasion, at the launching of the new steamship of the American Line, to make a vigorous attack upon our absurd navigation laws. The great steamship about which all the newspapers are hurrahing would never have been built had not those laws been modified. The President reminded his hearers of that fact, and advised them to couple their rejoicings over the great event with a determination to do away with the laws entirely, and thus "set free American mechanical industry and excite American enterprise." We commend to all disciples of good Americanism the following passage from his speech:

"I am not able to see why Americans owning ships, navigated by Americans and carrying American cargoes, should in any case be driven to the protection of a foreign flag; and it seems to me that the stars and stripes entering a port of the United States and spread over Americans and American property should never be frowned upon and repelled by American officials acting under the mandate of our navigation laws. In the interest of a revival of American commerce, so much needed, and for the honor of our flag, so dear to us all, I am willing that the defence of our government and flag shall be accorded to all ships of American ownership, wherever built. Make our flag a more familiar sight in the ocean-carrying trade, and thus remind our citizens that a large share of the carrying trade of the world is due them, and we need have no fear that our ship-builders, under laws giving them a fair chance, will suffer from foreign competition."

This heretical deliveranee seems to have been well received in the very innermost sanctuary of protection. The Philadelphia "Ledger" praises the President's courage, and the Phila-

delphia "Press" says that his speech was "in the main judicious and appropriate," though "in one or two sentences he furtively and guardedly suggested his peculiar view of the pathway to enlarged commerce." It would be interesting to know what the "Press" would regard as an open and unguarded suggestion of that view.

The defeat of Chairman Wilson in the recent election is another example of the irony of fate, of which political life has so many examples. He is one of the few men in public life who have always commanded the respect of political opponents, and not seldom their sympathy as well. His career has been marked in the highest degree by zeal for the public welfare, in promoting which he has always used fair means. Nobody can say that he has ever struck a foul blow, or taken an unfair advantage, or used his position to wrong an adversary. Added to high moral qualities, everybody acknowledges that he brought to the work which fell to his lot in Congress consummate ability and an industry which never flagged while his health lasted. Probably a retirement from Congress for a period will be beneficial to him by giving him opportunity for physical recovery which he could not otherwise gain. It would be a misfortune to the country if such a man were to be permanently removed from public life. He is another illustration of the injury inflicted on the State by compelling representatives to reside in the district.

It is but just to say that the Republicans have accepted their great victory in an excellent spirit. Some of the little fellows bark away, of course, about the instant restoration of McKinley duties, and there is some talk about the protectionist champion's being the "logical candidate" in 1896; but, for the most part, the Republican interpretation of the elections is that they gave

a verdict in favor of good government and strict party responsibility, and against machine politics, whether in city, State, or nation. There is no great eagerness for the meeting of the new Congress, as there would be if it were thought possible or wise for it to do anything in particular with the tariff. In fact, the shrewder Republican leaders are displaying no little equanimity over the fact that they will not have to formulate any policy for more than a year. The vicissitudes of the past six years have taught them to walk softly before the people, and not to run before they are sent. Republican leadership and party discipline appeared to great advantage in 1889–90, in everything except making an egregious mistake as to what the country wanted or would stand. That leadership and discipline will doubtless prove as effective in the next Congress, and, unless the bitter fruits of experience have been tasted in vain, far wiser, far more sensitive to public opinion.

(*From the New York "Herald," March 14, 1894.*)

Nowhere has the "Herald's" demand for the passage of a free ship bill met with a warmer response than in Boston, whose old merchants have vivid memories of the powerful American merchant marine that once carried to and from it over the seas a great foreign commerce.

They have watched the American fleets grow less and less, though the commerce increased, until the American merchant navy, now but a shadow of its former greatness, has given way, through restrictive and obsolete laws, to foreign ships and foreign traders.

It has been the settled conviction for a great many years among these well-informed merchants that in order to restore our American fleets to that common highway of nations, the broad ocean, we only need to have our ship-owners, who are engaged in foreign trade, put upon an *equal* footing with foreign ship-owners by a bill for the free registry of foreign-built vessels, when bought and used by American citizens in the foreign trade, instead of leaving them, as they are now, unprotected by our own flag, and placed at a disadvantage under the superior privileges granted the foreigner, unhampered as he is by duties on ship-building materials and on the supplies needed for running his ships in our foreign trade.

This would put them, they maintain, on an equal footing with the foreigners, in whose hands is now nearly all the carrying trade, and they believe that with a fair start Americans need ask no other favors nor any government bounties.

No one can speak with more authority on the subject than the merchant whose views we now give. He has been for many years a ship-owner, and was formerly very largely engaged in the China trade.

When the American flag floated on every sea his was to be seen as often as that of any other. He controlled a large fleet then. He now has but three vessels. One of these flies the

stars and stripes and brings him little or no return for his investment in her, while the other two are under the protection of the flag of Hawaii, and prove fairly remunerative.

BUT HE WANTS HIS OWN FLAG.

"I feel rather ashamed of it every time I think of my boats under a foreign flag," said he to our reporter, "but any other course under our laws means bankruptcy for the man who attempts to compete in the foreign trade. Our accursed laws have driven the American fleets off the ocean, and bounties or subsidies will never put them back. The passage of the Fithian bill for free registry or another similar measure would, I am confident, do so.

"The experience of England and Germany and every other nation that has legislated upon the question of free ships points undeniably to the fact that laws permitting free registry soon build up a mercantile marine and a large carrying trade and ship-building industry, while the adoption of bounties and subsidies to nurse a dying marine only kills it the sooner.

"Why cannot the United States learn that lesson?"

The result of this veteran merchant's consideration has been the preparation of a bill, to be found on p. 14, which gives his idea in brief compass. Its provisions as to the registry of foreign-built vessels are similar to those of the Fithian bill, in that it restricts their use by Americans to the foreign carrying trade, and reserves the large American coastwise trade to American-built vessels.

ANOTHER CHANGE ADVISABLE.

But he suggests a trial of the principle for ten years, which should be sufficient to prove its value to this country. And in addition he advocates such a change in the present laws relating to rebates upon ship-building materials brought into the United States for the use of our shipwrights as shall remove

the cause of the tedious delays and annoyances that builders have long complained about. On this subject he says:

"A close examination and conference with some of those few Americans who are still interested in our foreign trade discloses the fact that at this moment when we are talking of taxing our whole people to give bounties to American-built ships, we find a custom of holding in the Treasury ten per cent. of the drawback on foreign materials, and that in practice it is so difficult to get back (through red tape and other obstacles) the other nine-tenths of the duty paid, that the law has proved nearly nugatory, and has been so far of very little benefit to our shipping interest. Thus we must have some relief from legislation to render the present law of use, especially if we wish to benefit those building, repairing, or using the smaller class of vessels, who, if any persons do, certainly deserve the care of the government.

"Some amendment therefore of our existing laws regarding drawbacks is considered very important, besides that which will give to the American ship-owner and merchant the same absolute freedom in buying his ships which is already enjoyed by the much-hated foreigner, into whose hands our ill-judged legislation has transferred the greater part of our foreign trade."

The bill referred to would run thus:

A BILL TO PLACE THE AMERICAN MERCHANT MARINE, ENGAGED IN FOREIGN TRADE, UPON AN EQUALITY WITH THAT OF OTHER NATIONS.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled:

That for the period of ten years from and after the passage of this act, so many of the various provisions of title 48, of the Revised Statutes of the United States, entitled "Regulation of Commerce and Navigation," embraced in chapters 1 and 9 of said title, and from section 4131 to section 4305, both in-

clusive, as prohibit or restrict citizens of the United States from purchasing ships built in other countries, and to be used in the foreign carrying trade, or which impose taxes, burdens, or restrictions on foreign-built ships employed in the foreign carrying trade, when owned by American citizens, which are not imposed on ships built in the United States, be and are hereby suspended, and it shall be lawful thereafter for the period aforesaid for all citizens of the United States to buy ships built in whole or in part in any foreign country, and have them registered as ships of the United States for employment in the foreign carrying trade, and when so purchased and registered and employed in the foreign carrying trade, such ships shall be entitled to all the rights and subject only to the same regulations as are provided by law for the government and management of ships built wholly within the United States and controlled by citizens thereof.

SECTION 2. And be it further enacted that this bill shall not be so construed as to permit any ship built in any other country and purchased and registered by citizens of the United States, as provided in the preceding section, to be employed in the coasting trade or engaged in the transportation of freight or passengers between ports of the United States.

SECTION 3. And be it further enacted that section 17 of the act of June 26, 1884, entitled, "An act to remove certain burdens on the American merchant marine and encourage the American carrying trade, and for other purposes," be amended so as to read as follows:

When a vessel is built, equipped, and fitted out in the United States by or for an American citizen for employment in the foreign trade, wholly or partly of foreign materials on which import duties have been paid, there shall be allowed on such vessel when completed ready for service a drawback equal in amount to the duty paid on such materials, outfit, and equipment, to be ascertained under such regulations as may be prescribed by the Secretary of the Treasury. But it is hereby

AMERICANS PROTECTED TO DEATH.

The laws of trade are immutable, and so long as our people set them at defiance in this particular, the American ship owner and merchant must be contented with a very insignificant position. But while it is clear that any impartial coroner's jury sitting upon the remains of our foreign shipping interests would to-day bring in a verdict of "protected to death," it is equally clear that competition and free trade in ships, and the materials and supplies for their use, would in due time restore not only our flag to the seas and the foreign trade which naturally follows it to our citizens, but also the activity of our ship-yards, which is now a matter of tradition to the young and of memory among the old men.

We don't ask for charity in the way of subsidies, but simply for the protection of our flag in doing what by treaty or friendship we have long allowed every Englishman, Dutchman, Frenchman, or Sandwich Islander to do.

Among the most vigorous leaders of our mercantile sea kings, Capt. Ira Bursley was, in the early part of this century, recognized as a leader who had done as much as any other one man to place the American mercantile marine in the position which it then held among commercial nations. His son, the late Ira Bursley, of New York, wrote, in 1890, the following letter, which compactly gives the essence of our argument:

NEW YORK, April 19, 1890.

DEAR SIR: . . . . . .

I agree with you that Civil-service Reform is but a secondary affair compared with Tariff Reform.

As regards our Navigation Laws, it is a disgrace to the intelligence of the American people that they should have stood so long. They have protected American ships off the face of the waters. We have refused to learn of others; have seen the British flag displace ours, and never asked the cause. Very different has been the course of English law-makers. I remember in 1849, I was with my father in Liverpool when he and Captain Knight, then master of the ship "New World," were summoned to London to appear before a Committee of the House of Commons, then sitting, to inquire into the cause of the rapid improvement in American ships and American merchant-service, and the decline in British merchant-shipping. My father was unable to attend, but I remember hearing Captain Knight, who did, relate the questions that were asked him as to how our American ships were owned; what food was served in the forecastle; what pay men received; what the officers; cost of construction of ships, etc., etc. Every point was covered and compared with what was paid out to the English merchantmen. The result of the work of this committee was to set forth the reason why American ships were better

built and better sailed than English ships, and the fact being once settled that they WERE better, Great Britain repealed her navigation laws and permitted her citizens to buy their ships. *What a difference in the methods of working between John Bull and ourselves! He finds his merchant marine running down, and ours getting ahead of him, and repeals the law which has prevented an Englishman from buying foreign ships.* We, forty years later, and with the success of this policy so plainly before our eyes, have a committee meet to consider the reverse of the position of 1849, viz.: Our merchant marine in the depths of dissolution, and English merchant ships the best in the world.

And what do we do? We advise scattering the money of the people to ship-owners in the form of subsidy. To-day, when I do not believe there are over sixty American sailing-vessels engaged in foreign commerce which are A 1, we are to subsidize these few ships in the hope that under government aid they will increase. . . . . .

Yours truly,

IRA BURSLEY.

(*From Philadelphia "Times," March 2, 1894.*)

FREE SHIPS.

If the House of Representatives can ever get down to business, it ought to pass promptly Mr. Fithian's bill to enable American citizens to purchase vessels for foreign trade and sail them under the United States flag.

It is a remarkable thing that the people who talk the loudest about raising the flag in distant parts of the world persistently object to raising the flag over ocean-going ships. Seven-tenths of the foreign commerce of this country a generation ago was carried on in American vessels; now little more than one-tenth of it is covered by our flag, and in spite of tariffs, bounties, and subsidies our merchant marine goes steadily downward.

Vastly more valuable than the acquisition of foreign territory would be the acquisition of foreign ships. A navy is a fine thing, but what is the use of a navy to protect our commerce if we have no commerce to protect? Americans have not lost their enterprise, except as it has been knocked out of them by the "home market" policy, but they are so hampered by antiquated navigation laws that they have had to stand by and see the foreign carrying trade of the country taken out of their hands.

The time has come to get some of it back. This can only be done by entering into competition with other commercial nations and enabling Americans to acquire ships wherever they can and bring them under the American flag. In that way we could build up our commerce again, and build up our own shipyards as well.

(*From Jackson (Mich.) "Patriot," March 9, 1894.*)

FREE SHIPS.

In many respects the legislation of the United States is more hostile to the word "free" than is that of any other country. A generation ago the word "free," applied to black men, was odious to a majority of our people. "Free" soil was also a hated term. "Free" trade is now regarded as unworthy of acceptance. "Free" coinage of silver is despised by our plutocrats. "Free" ships is another objectionable phrase. When the word "free" indicates a proposed economic policy, it is at once stamped upon vehemently. You cannot find the word "free" used to designate any proposed legislation without stirring up the animosity of a majority of the American people, though, when adopted, they approve it by a large majority. . . .

Under the protection system our tonnage employed in the foreign carrying trade has declined from 2,348,358 in 1855, to 883,199 in 1893. Within the last ten years it has decreased

386,000, and the latest official reports make it lower than it has ever been, subsequent to 1840, when it was 899,765, and rapidly increasing. But now the progress of decadence is so unmistakable that it can be arrested only by heroic measures.

Foreigners see it, if we cannot. Mr. Gustav Schwab, of the North German Lloyd line of steamers, says, with great force, that if Americans were permitted to buy their ships where they chose, the effect on American ship-builders before long would be that they would launch just as good and just as cheap vessels as can be built elsewhere. And he notes the fact that this has been the effect of free trade in ships in Germany, which is now pushing ahead in the development of her mercantile marine, and consequently in her foreign commerce. All thoughtful people will see in her success on the ocean a fine example of the great benefit which we would surely derive from free trade in ships.

(*From Albany "Argus," April 5, 1894.*)

A FREE MERCHANT MARINE.

Every year millions of bushels of grain are exported from our ports, and the benefit of this carrying goes almost entirely to fill the pockets of English ship-owners. There are, of course, Americans interested in these corporations, but the number of them is few. But one ship flying the stars and stripes carried grain from our coast last year.

A new and broad shipping bill is what this country needs; let it be as broad as to include vessels that are built in England or in New Zealand. Our merchant marine is ridiculously small, and a great deal of the present condition must be laid to our existing laws.

America is the land of progress, her citizens are intelligent and progressive. The law prevents a ship from flying the American flag unless it has been built in our waters, and this is one reason that has crippled American shipping. American

merchants are patriotic, but they are going to leave the field clear to Englishmen until they can get an equal chance at equal prices.

A free shipping bill is now being discussed in Congress, and Congressman Tracey, of this district, has also introduced another measure with the same purpose in view. Shake off the shackles that stifle and kill our merchant marine. The American flag should be as often seen on the ocean as the flag of Great Britain, and this can be easily done if Congress will take a commonsense view of the present situation.

(From Erie (Pa.) "Herald," April 6, 1894.)

THE FREE-SHIP BILL.

Statistics of the grain trade of New York for the year 1893 show that the total exports for that year were 55,768,726 bushels. British vessels carried 34,259,656 bushels; German vessels, 4,292,737; Dutch vessels, 4,651,111; Belgian vessels, 5,240,242; French vessels, 2,400,269; Portuguese vessels, 2,213,108; Norwegian vessels, 124,502; Spanish vessels, 597,149; Italian vessels, 813,516; American vessels, not a single bushel!

It is a deplorable, not to say disgraceful, showing; especially when the fact is recalled that the time was when the great bulk of this business was under American control. In the fifties, about 75 per cent. of the exports from and imports to this country were carried in American vessels. American shipping is better protected than is any other interest, but in spite (or possibly because) of this fact it has almost gone out of existence, so far as the foreign trade is concerned.

. . . . . .

The effect of the Fithian bill would, doubtless, be to stimulate American ship-building. It certainly could not injure the

industry, for it is restricted already to building vessels exclusively for the coasting trade. The adoption of a free-ship policy by Germany has been of immense benefit to the ship-building industry of that country.

The passage of the bill will bring employment to American capital, American sailors, and American mechanics. It has been favorably reported, and it ought not to fail of enactment by the present Congress.

The bill would not affect the coasting trade, either on the sea-coast or the lakes, which will continue to be restricted to vessels of American build. For obvious reasons the placing of such a restriction on international trade is practically impossible.

(*From New Orleans "Picayune," April 9, 1894.*)

TO REVIVE AMERICAN SHIPPING INTERESTS.

The "Picayune," realizing the enormous pecuniary loss which results to the American people from the driving of their merchant ships from the seas, not to speak of the disgrace to the nation of having to admit that its vessels cannot sail the ocean in competition with foreign ships, has urged upon Congress the imperious duty of applying a remedy and of rescuing the American flag from the shameful condition of being banished from the ocean.

It is estimated that the freights paid to foreigners for carrying our products abroad, and for bringing our imports from across the seas, amount to $200,000,000 a year. Americans are not able to earn one dollar of this money, because there are no American ships; and there are no American ships because European ship-builders can make iron and steel steamers 25 per cent. cheaper than they can be made in this country.

Under these circumstances many patriotic persons, who want to see a revival of their shipping, have urged that American citizens should be allowed to purchase foreign-built ships, have

them brought in duty free and registered under the United States flag. To-day this is forbidden, and as a consequence there are not a few foreign-built ships owned by citizens of the United States, but sailed under foreign flags. . . .

SUMMARY

OF THE ARGUMENT FOR FREE PURCHASE OF SHIP-BUILDING MATERIALS AND SUPPLIES.

While it may be admitted that there are plausible although not sound claims set up to catch the superficial observer and voter, for what is called a tariff for protecting mill owners, miners, and lumbermen, and that these claims, backed by rich partisan monopolists, may prolong for a limited time the existence of a tariff, framed for protection instead of for revenue, there is not and cannot be the slightest pretext or excuse for continuing in force the obsolete and mischievous navigation and other laws which, after a full trial, have proved so disastrous to both American ship-builders, American ship-owners, and the officers and men of our mercantile marine.

Such laws, when carefully studied, can only be upheld by those who prefer foreign cheap labor to American, and by the few ship-builders of Maine, Pennsylvania, and Delaware, who, through political influence or otherwise, think they hold a monopoly.

WHAT WILL FOLLOW A CHANGE.

A general discussion of the whole subject indicates that with such a bill in force the struggle would at once come to regain, by practice, our skill in ship-building and ship-managing, which we have so unluckily lost by giving the foreign ship-owners the vantage ground which we had occupied. Yankee invention and enterprise must bring eventual success, but we have got to fight for it.

Naturally, and almost inevitably, foreign ship-owners will employ their own countrymen as captains and officers of the ships and will buy their supplies in foreign markets. To-day ship-building materials are nominally taxed only about one per cent. to the builder, but in practice there are so many difficulties in getting back duties overpaid that our ship-builders do not get much, if any, benefit out of what are nominally free materials.

With a position of equality as toward the foreigner in buying our ships, the other difficulties in the question of managing the foreign trade would in due time solve themselves. And there seems no reason why we should not again resume the dominion of the seas which we once thought our own.

NO SUBSIDIES OR BOUNTIES.

We ask no subsidies or bounties, but only to be put on a par with the foreigner, whom we have been so long protecting.

With the foreign ship-yards open to us, and with the materials for ship-building not only free, but